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ADP013377

TITLE: Chemical and Biological Terrorism: A Brazillian Perspective

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This paper is part of the following report:

TITLE: Chemical and Biological Medical Treatment Symposium - Industry
II World Congress on Chemical and Biological Terrorism

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ADP013371 thru ADP013468

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7. CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL TERRORISM: A BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

While several regions in the world suffer the increase of terrorism threat of both "conventional" or chemical and biological nature, Brazil has been largely immune to such situation. This paper analyses the Federal Government's position in relation to chemical and biological terrorism and assesses the current prevention and response capability to such an event.

INTRODUCTION

While the process of globalisation has promoted constructive global and political alliances, it has concurrently advanced the activities of, and alliances among, transnational terrorists, organised crime enterprises, and extremist groups of every conceivable type. These "threat alliances" have formed transnational cooperatives with immense global financial and human resources. Moreover, national, regional, and international security issues are of quite a different nature from those that the world has been dealing with for decades. The post Cold War era presents a different, diversified and more threatening range of security issues that places large civilian populations in direct danger. Today, new security issues have supplanted traditional ones (e.g., force balances, deterrence, etc.) and one of the main threats comes from the spread of conventional and non-conventional weapons and terrorism. South American countries present the right conditions for the organization of terrorism groups and action. In fact, most countries in region have a history of terrorism. Despite the fact that several of these conditions, such as high unemployment and lack of opportunity, chronic economic problems, political instability, civil unrest, famine and disease, environmental problem, and others, were present in Brazil for decades, the country has no history of terrorism. This paper examines the Brazilian perspective on Bio/Chem terrorism.

GLOBALISATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY - A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Globalisation can be broadly defined as the process of softening geopolitical boundaries, favouring relatively unrestricted travel, commerce and communication of all types. The process of globalisation has, directly or indirectly, involved all sectors of the global economy and no country can avoid it. While transnational companies and a few countries benefit enormously from the gains of "playing" on a global scale, some nations experience just the opposite. A study conducted by Boxberg and Klimenta (1999) (1) reveals a sinister side of globalisation, with endemic unemployment in a growing number of countries, criminal exploitation of the finite natural resources of emerging and underdeveloped countries, a concentration of financial resources, and weakening of national state.

This irreversible process has also favoured the activities of groups that promote terror and has permitted others the access to destructive technologies that are today threatening national and regional security. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Cold War, states and other groups began to have unlimited access to conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction, and communications technologies.

TERRORISM: DEFINITIONS, PATTERNS AND CAUSES

Definitions of terrorism have not gained universal acceptance. The US Department of State has provided some definitions of terms that are generally used and applied when terrorism is discussed. For the US Department of State the term "terrorism" means "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." The term "international terrorism" has been defined as "terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country" and the term "terrorism group" as "any group practicing, or that has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism" (1999).

Although the amount of international terrorism has been falling consistently since the mid 1980's, the threat of terrorist acts is increasing. The reduction in the number of attacks can be largely attributed to progress in law enforcement measures and diplomatic efforts around the world. The total number of terrorist attacks in 1998 was 273, a reduction from the 304 attacks registered in 1997, and the lowest annual total figure since 1971. However, the number of fatal victims in 1998 was 741, a record high, and the number of injured reached 5,952 (2). The most prominent attacks in 1998 were the bombings in August of the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar as Salaam, Tanzania. The attack in Kenya helped to increase significantly the number of fatal victims and injuries. The US Embassy in Nairobi was located in a highly congested area and as a result of the explosion 291 people died and about 5,000 were wounded.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon and has been used as a political weapon in virtually all parts of the globe. Sendero Luminoso (Peru), the IRA (Northern Ireland), the ETA (Basque Separatist Group - Spain), the Red Brigade (Italy), the Fundi (Algeris), the Abu Nidal Organization (Iraq), the Hizballah (Lebanon), and the Khmer Rouge (Cambodia), are just a few examples of some well established groups. The causes of terrorism, or what leads to the organisation of terrorism groups, are many and diversified. Terrorism root causes have been attributed to religion fanaticism, political instability, chronic economic problems, famine and disease, environmental problems, demography (over population), lack of opportunities, civil unrest, wars and guerrillas, among others. All these issues can contribute or trigger the organisation of terrorist groups and action. The globalisation process, as discussed previously, provides the right conditions and environment for terrorism to flourish and become more deadly.

TERRORISM: A BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVE

It is interesting to observe that Brazil, a country that presents several of the above "conditions", has been largely immune to terrorism. The largest country in South America has a near clean sheet in respect to terrorism. The dictatorial military regime that ruled the country between 1964 and 1985 registered a few cases of terrorism. As it turned out, most attacks were attributed to the regime itself. Apart from a few episodes during this dark period, the country has no history of terrorism.

The fact that terrorism has been largely regarded as a non-priority security issue does not mean that the country is completely immune to terrorism activities. There are a number of South American neighboring countries that suffer from terrorism activities such as Colombia (FRAC - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), Peru SL (Sendero Luminoso) and the MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement), Chile (the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front) just to name a few. The main governmental concern has been with the use of the Brazilian territory by those groups to carry out several illicit activities such drug and arms smuggling to support their causes. The recent United States presence in Colombia has driven both drug lords and terrorists into the Brazilian Amazon forest. This region is virtually

uninhabited and almost impossible to control due to its continental dimensions and inhospitable conditions. There are thousands of kilometers of jungle that borders with other countries.

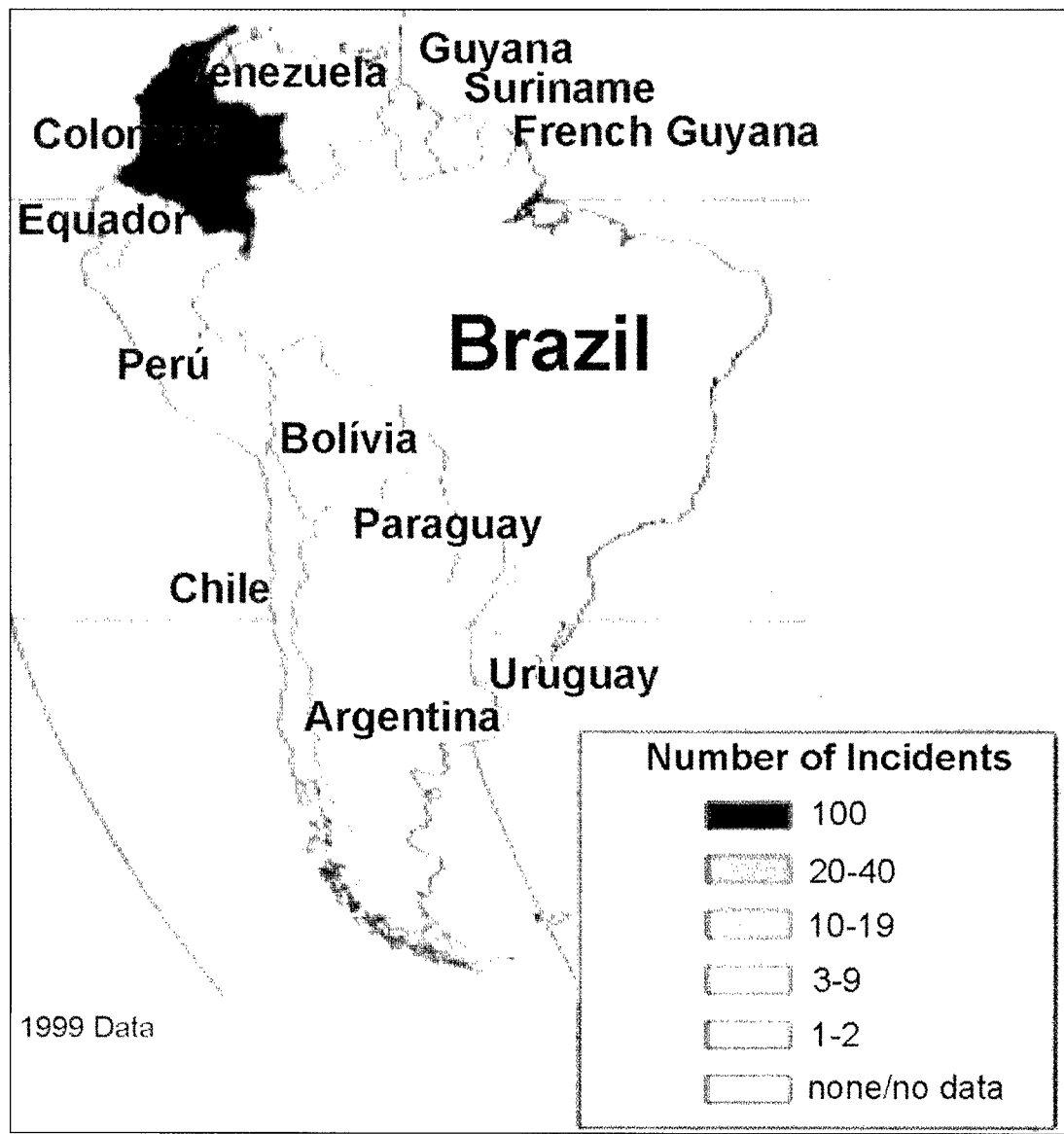


Figure 1 - South American Map

The opening of the borders with other Mercosul (Southern Common Market) member states (Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina) has also contributed to the free flow of both goods and people. It is now known that both the Chinese and Russian mafias are well established in the country and has been involved in several cases of arms smuggling to and from regions that host terrorism groups in neighbouring countries. Hate groups has emerged in the last decades in some parts of the country and their activities involve attacks to both properties and individuals. The Brazilian land reform movement (MST) has carried out hostile manifestation against governmental and private properties, including cutting power towers, which have caused blackouts in large industrial and residential areas for several days. Considering that the Brazilian Government has been unable to inhibit objectively any of the above recent

trends in violence and illicit activities, it is not impossible to envisage any of the groups above applying terrorism tactics. Indeed, the escalation of violence in large cities such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Recife and others, has reached a guerilla status. Criminals are better equipped than the police forces and have been using grenades and explosives in their activities. These incidents would be characterized in other countries as terrorism, but the term has not yet been used in Brazil.

The responsibility for overseeing terrorism issues in Brazil lies under several bodies. At the Federal level it involves the Ministry of Defense (Army), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Civil Defense and the Federal Police. Brazilian capability to deal with a Bio/Chem attack is limited. The main reason for that is the lack of precedent. Another reason is the fact that there are clearly other security priority issues topping governmental agenda. The country does not count with any formal special force or unit to deal with a CB terrorism threat or attack. In late 1990s, Brazil engaged in international counterterrorism efforts specially with Argentina and Paraguay.

CONCLUSION

The organization of terrorist groups and action is said to occur where conditions such as political instability, chronic economic problems, religion fanaticism, famine and disease, over population, environmental problems, lack of opportunities, civil unrest, wars and guerrillas, among others, prevail. Despite the fact that many of these conditions were for decades, and some still are, present in Brazil, the country has no history of terrorism.

However, recent events, such as the US presence in Colombia, have driven terrorist groups into the Brazilian territory. There is evidence to suggest that terrorist groups are using the country for money laundering, drug and arms smuggling and training. The lack of terrorism precedent has not prompted the government to proactive action and the country does not count with any special or formal counterterrorism unity or force. Having said that, if a Bio/Chem terrorism attack occurs, the consequences can be catastrophic.

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KEYWORDS:

Brazil, Terrorism, National Preparedness

FIGURE

Figure 1 – South America